

VZCZCXRO2008  
RR RUEHLN RUEHVK RUEHYG  
DE RUEHDBU #1654/01 2490816  
ZNR UUUUU ZZH

R 060816Z SEP 06  
FM AMEMBASSY DUSHANBE  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 8504  
INFO RUCNCIS/CIS COLLECTIVE  
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC  
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC  
RHEHAAA/NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL WASHINGTON DC  
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RUEHBBS/USEU BRUSSELS 1078  
RUEHWR/AMEMBASSY WARSAW 0011  
RUEHDBU/AMEMBASSY DUSHANBE 9909

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 DUSHANBE 001654

SIPDIS

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STATE FOR SCA/CEN, DRL

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: NINE WEEKS OUT: OSCE UNDECIDED ON ELECTION OBSERVERS IN TAJIKISTAN

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**¶1.** (U) After a weeklong visit, the OSCE/ODIHR Needs Assessment Mission (NAM) remains undecided on whether or not it will send a full-scale observation mission for the November 6 presidential election. The NAM, comprised of three OSCE/ODIHR officials, debriefed international missions August 31 on its findings which will be formally published mid-September. During its visit to Tajikistan, the NAM met with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, parliament, local government administrations in Qurgon-Teppa and Kulob, and political party leaders.

**¶2.** (SBU) Government officials assured the NAM that Tajikistan will officially invite OSCE observers. They also told the NAM that election regulations will ensure equal treatment for all candidates. The NAM reported it believes the present administration has people with knowledge and experience necessary to conduct a fair election if they actually obey President Rahmonov's call for a fair election. (COMMENT: At this point, many people at the debriefing looked up and snickered. Although the top of the administration gives public lip-service to a free and fair election, the consensus among the audience was that the administration is not willing to expend much energy to substantially improve the democratic election process and curb corrupt election practices, especially at the local level. END COMMENT)

**¶3.** (U) Despite the NAM's positive meetings with the government, the mission's indecision lies in the legislative and election rules that restrict competition. The OSCE expects to send observers five weeks before the election, but the scope of the mission remains unclear, with the following three possible

scenarios:

-- An Election Support Team with less than five election experts could be sent to the local OSCE office to assist with monitoring and reporting. This is the most likely scenario if no candidate emerges to run against Rahmonov or the OSCE deems that the rules set by the Central Committee on Elections and Referenda do not permit a level playing field.

-- A Limited Election Observation Mission would allow long-term observers for internal OSCE reporting, but no short-term observers for election day.

-- A Full-Scale Observation Mission would include long-term observers as well as up to two hundred short-term observers stationed throughout the country on the actual day of the election. OSCE/ODHIR would publish a report on the election as it did for the 2005 Parliamentary Elections.

**¶4.** (U) At any time the OSCE could alter its decision to adapt to changing circumstances. For instance, if OSCE sent a limited mission but the election suddenly became credibly competitive, the OSCE would be prepared to train internationals already based in Tajikistan as short-term observers. Similarly, if it sent in a full-scale mission, but the government cracked down on media freedom or eliminated a candidate, the OSCE could respond critically by withdrawing its observers.

**¶5.** (U) United Nations Tajikistan Office of Peacebuilding head Ambassador Sotirov advocated strongly for a full-scale observation mission with short-term observers. A full mission would signal to the people of Tajikistan that the international community still maintains a watchful eye on the future of democracy in Tajikistan and might encourage them to continue election reform in the future.

**¶6.** (U) Without a full-scale mission including short-term

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observers, the OSCE will not publish its election observation findings, leaving the field open to other observers, such as those sent by the CIS, no matter how inaccurate or biased. With a full-scale mission, the OSCE would provide a legitimate and thorough analysis to counter those reports. Its constructive criticism would send a clear message that Tajikistan needs to strengthen its democratic processes and may help lay the groundwork for future election reform.

**¶7.** (U) During the August 31 briefing the OSCE declared they would send a mission, but appeared genuinely uncertain about the type of mission. Over the next several days the OSCE will analyze the CCER decree and wait to see if anyone will run against Rahmonov. Political parties will announce potential candidates fifty days prior to the election.

**¶8.** (U) COMMENT: The Tajiks were clearly not pleased with the OSCE's findings after the parliamentary elections in February 2005. If the OSCE refrains from fielding a mission in order to send a message that the presidential election is not free or fair, that message will have little resonance inside Tajikistan.

Tajik media, predominantly state-run and Russian-biased, would be critical of the OSCE's inaction and could look to other CIS observers more willing to bless a flawed process. A full OSCE mission will provide the best avenue for critique of Tajikistan's unfair election and set the tone for future elections. END COMMENT.

JACOBSON